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Title: The Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs laid the statement regarding Abolition of Emigration Check Requirement Suspension (ECRS) System – laid.

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): I beg to lay the statement regarding an important reform measure under the Emigration Act that I propose to implement for the benefit of a large number of poor people.

Under the Emigration Act, 1983 a person holding a passport as Emigration Check Required (ECR) is required to obtain emigration clearance from the Protector of Emigrants (POE) before leaving the country for overseas employment. This is a statutory requirement.

The Emigration Act does not cover ECR passport holders who travel overseas for visits other than for employment. However, for the last two decades administrative instructions have been in force requiring them to obtain Emigration clearance Requirement Suspension or what is commonly referred to as ECRS.

Sir, the ECRS system has no statutory basis. No other country imposes such restrictions on International travel. The ECRS system has led to considerable inconvenience and harassment to passengers, it has resulted in corruption in POE offices and a nexus between unscrupulous recruiting agents and middleman resulting in the exploitation of a large number of poor people.

* Laid on the Table and also placed in Library. See No. LT 6933/2007

Sir, last year over 5.5 lakh people who traveled overseas for purposes other than employment had to obtain ECRS.

The ECRS system, which has no statutory basis is retrograde. It levies a form of tax, which is the ECRS fee on a poor person apart from resulting in corruption. Though it was introduced with a good intention to prevent misuse of visit visa for employment purposes It has not achieved its objective.

The Ministry therefore critically examined this matter and placed a proposal for abolition of ECRS before the Committee of Secretaries (COS), chaired by the cabinet Secretary. The COS in its meeting held on 20th August 2007 has approved the proposal.

Sir, before giving effect *to* the abolition of the ECRS system, I wish to share with this August House the merits of this important reform measure.

First and foremost it will save over six lakh poor passengers from inconvenience and harassment. As a result of the abolition of the ECRS all ECR Passport holders will be saved from incurring unnecessary expenditure estimated annually at about Rs. 600 crores.

Secondly the uneducated ECR passport holder does not know the distinction between emigration clearance, which is mandatory for employment overseas, and ECRS, which is only for, visits abroad. This ignorance is often exploited to send them abroad for employment on visit visas. The poor worker does not know that the agent has only arranged a visit visa that does not entitle him to work abroad. By abolishing ECRS this ambiguity will be removed.

To ensure that the data on ECR passport holders going abroad on visit visa is captured, we have requested the Ministry of Home Affairs to modify the departure and arrival cards suitably.

Sir, I am grateful for this opportunity to share with the Members of this House an important Emigration reform that we will be implementing from October 1, 2007.

12.04 Â¼ hrs.

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